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*On the UTILITY of COLONIES as FIELDS for EMIGRATION.**By* HERMAN MERIVALE, ESQ.

[Read before Section (F) at Cambridge, 6th October, 1862.]

THE utility of colonization to a community circumstanced like that of England, is pretty generally admitted. It is usually considered to be the result of two main causes,—first, and most important, the superior productiveness of capital and labour when applied to a new soil; secondly, the relief which emigration affords to the pressure of population on subsistence. It is, of course, perfectly true in the abstract that, under a system of free trade, a country would gain as much by directing her capital and her emigrants to a new soil under foreign dominion as under her own. But as, in the present state of the world, England is the only colonizing country of Europe, this truth becomes of little practical importance.

The benefit of colonization may therefore stand for my purpose as admitted. But how far the retaining a colony under the dominion of the mother country contributes—first, to the facility of investing capital there; secondly, to the facility of locating emigrants there; is quite another question.

Put in a scientific shape, the question of the “economical advantage of colonies” might stand as follows:—How far is the profitable application of the accumulated knowledge, capital, and labour of an old country to the production of wealth in a new country aided by the circumstance that both are under the same Government?—a question not so easily answered as is sometimes supposed, but of which the solution belongs to the politician, not the economist. Obviously, under a system of free trade, it would be immaterial how soon a colony shook off the dominion of the mother country (or rather the mother country would gain through a reduction of expenditure), if the emancipated colony remained equally prosperous and equally friendly. But if it did not; if its advance was checked by internal insecurity, if it became actuated by feelings of hostility, if it fell under the dominion of, or into connection with, foreign states; if it adopted hostile tariffs, or opposed the admission of our emigrants; then we should find that the loss of the colony was the loss of an economical advantage. And then we might, perchance, discover that “ships, colonies, and commerce,” are a little more nearly connected than it is now the fashion in some quarters to suppose them.

The greater branch of this subject, that, namely, which relates to the increase of wealth in new countries, and how far this may depend on political connection, I intend to leave for the present; and to confine myself to the minor, but still very important inquiry, how far the advantage which we derive from emigration as an outlet for our people, might be affected by any political change involving the loss of colonial empire.

I. The beneficial effect of regular, sustained, and copious emigration on the social condition of the country whence the emigrants proceed, is scarcely, in my belief, appreciated as it should be by political thinkers. It is our habit rather to look on emigration as beneficial to the emigrants only, or to the mother country but indirectly, through increase of trade. But, although this may be the more important side of the question, as it certainly is the most attractive, the other also merits very earnest attention. It is necessary that we should estimate at its right value the good we have hitherto enjoyed from unlimited facility of emigration, and the danger we now run of having that advantage very seriously curtailed. It is necessary to fix our eyes at the outset on the old Malthusian doctrine, which has been a little out of sight of late years, owing to the prosperity which has recently prevailed, but which is as true now as it ever was, and is receiving some very remarkable confirmations, and expanding into some unsuspected corollaries. Population in any country has a tendency to increase more rapidly than the means of subsistence can increase. Population doubles in twenty or twenty-five years. Subsistence (unless under very extraordinary circumstances), will not increase in anything like this ratio. The disproportion must be kept down, either by increase of deaths, or by a diminution in the amount of subsistence enjoyed by each individual (that is, a falling off in the general well-being), or by diminution of births through the "prudential" check,—that is, generally speaking, by fewer and later marriages; or, lastly, by emigration. Of course, any number of these causes may be found in combination.

Now ever since the commencement of the potato disease in 1845, if not a little earlier, there has been a very marked diminution in the rate at which population has advanced in Western Europe. In France the rate of increase was estimated at 0.646 per annum from 1801 to 1836; at 0.445 from 1836 to 1856, and is now less. In Western Germany there has been an extremely slow increase in most parts, an actual diminution in others*. In our own country, taking the United Kingdom together, the population, since the census of 1841, has increased no faster than that of France. That of Ireland has greatly diminished. That of Scotland has scarcely increased at

* In Hesse, Electoral and Grand Ducal, from 1,610,000 in 1832, to 1,571,000 in 1858.

all. The whole increase is in England and Wales, and generally speaking in the towns and manufacturing districts.

To take the case of England and Wales alone, these had 18,000,000 of inhabitants in 1851; 20,000,000 in 1861; but it must be remembered that England draws constantly-increasing supplies of people from other parts; the whole 2,000,000 therefore, cannot be set down as natural increase. Probably the entire natural increase in the decennium has been under 10 per cent.; that of France something under 4 per cent. And yet during the same decennium, England and Wales has sent out emigrants in great numbers; France none at all—that is, the accessions to her population from without are supposed to balance her trifling loss by emigration. It is not possible to estimate exactly the number of emigrants from England and Wales, exclusive of the rest of the United Kingdom, but probably throughout the decennium they have averaged above 100,000 a-year. The births in the same period have increased from 600,000 to nearly 700,000 per annum, average 650,000. The marriages in 1851 were 154,000; in 1860, 170,000. That is, they increase at about the same rate as the population. There have been from four to four and a-half births in each year in proportion to every marriage which has taken place in each year; so that the fertility of marriages may be represented by 4·5—a rate which appears to be steady. I omit, for the sake of simplicity, all corrections arising from illegitimate births, which would not materially affect the general result.

Now if we suppose that no emigration had taken place, but that the number of marriages, condition, and increase of the population had remained the same, it is clear that there could only have been something less than four births in the year for every marriage. “The prudential check” on births must needs have operated to this extent, probably through later marriages. In other words, every sixth child, or nearly so, has been provided for by emigration. Now let us see what amount of verifications these estimates and conjectures derive from the known facts regarding the progress of population in France during the same period.

In France, as has been said, the increase in the decennium has been barely 4 per cent., and there has been no emigration; consequently there must have been either,—1. Diminution in the comfort of the population. But the contrary is the fact. The general well-being has a tendency to increase. From 1817 to 1824 the average duration of life was 31·8 years; from 1847 to 1854, 37·4, and is now about 38. (I quote from tables contained in the “*Annuaire de l'Economie Politique*.”) Longer life implies more comfortable life; or, 2. Increased mortality. But the same table (of the average duration of life) disproves this likewise. Mortality has in France a tendency to diminish; or, 3. Diminution in the relative

number of marriages. But the relative number of marriages does not diminish, but remains singularly stationary. (In 1821-30, 1 for 127·71 inhabitants; 1831-40, 1 for 125·82; 1841-50, 1 for 126·01. I have not seen a later return, but there is no reason to suppose any sensible variation). 4. We are, therefore, reduced by the exhaustive process to the last and inevitable conclusion, since all other conceivable causes fail. The only reason for the scarcely perceptible rate of advance in the French population, must be a diminution in the fertility of marriages; and this fact, to which *a priori* reasoning thus forcibly leads us, is fully proved by statistical records. While marriages have, as we have seen, augmented with the population, births have remained for forty years absolutely stationary. In 1817 there were 944,000 births in France; in 1856, 952,000; and in the whole number of years since 1815, they have, I think, never fallen short of 900,000, nor exceeded 1,000,000. The average fecundity of marriages is, therefore, steadily, but slowly, diminishing. From 1822 to 1831, it was represented by 3·64; 1832 to 1841, 3·41; 1842 to 1851, 3·19; in 1855 it had fallen to 2·96; in 1856, risen to 3·11. "Si cette diminution ne s'arrête pas" (says a writer in the "Annuaire de l'Economie Politique"), "on peut prévoir au moins le moment où la population deviendra complètement stationnaire."

Stated broadly, therefore, the result is this. Both in France and England the well-being of the people increases, or at all events does not diminish. But in order to secure this essential, the French are compelled to contract later marriages and have fewer children than heretofore. The English can enjoy the same result without putting the like constraint on nature, and may marry almost as early as their forefathers did, although they live much longer; and this they owe in great measure, though not wholly, to an established emigration, which has become part of the institutions of the country, and which makes provision for pretty nearly one child in six. I do not wish to exaggerate the advantages of early marriages and numerous children. It may be that the French, on the whole, purchase cheaply the maintenance of the national well-being by the sacrifice of a portion of the reproductive powers of their people. But I think none will hesitate for a moment in esteeming that nation comparatively happy, which can equally maintain the national well-being without such an unnatural and unhealthy sacrifice; and, if so, none can be blind to the enormous advantage of continuous, and therefore reliable, emigration as an outlet.

II. It is necessary now to proceed to the second branch of our inquiry. If emigration can be carried on as copiously and as regularly without colonization as with it, colonization is clearly (as far as the interest of emigration is concerned) a mere loss. Colonization involves considerable expenditure of capital in founding

colonies, some expenditure in governing them. Germany (or at least the western and northern parts of it) has profited very greatly by emigration, and that without any cost to its Government at all. In the last ten years a million of German colonists have gone to the United States alone. I have said that in some parts of the country the population is stationary, probably kept down in great measure by emigration; and there is no reason to doubt that this efflux must have contributed materially to the maintenance of the standard of well-being. The United Kingdom, from 1825 to 1855, sent in round numbers a million and a-half of emigrants to the colonies, two millions and a-half to the United States.* But the placing of the million and a-half cost the British taxpayer considerable sums for the foundation of the Australian colonies, and for the defence of all. The placing of the two millions and a-half cost the British taxpayer nothing.†

This is true, and it is a truth which only two years ago was pretty generally deemed conclusive of the question. It appeared clear that colonies were no gain to us, for the absorption of emigrants, except as regards that overplus only for whom the States had no room. But two years have made an enormous, and it is to be feared, a durable change in our prospects in this respect. The great receptacle of the emigrants of the world, the great refuge of the poor, the great home of the homeless, the great field for the adventurous seems to be closed. Permanently closed it can hardly be. Its natural advantages remain the same as ever; the need of Europe remains the same; and in some way or other, these advantages will, we must hope, be made available for that need. But political foresight fails to see how or when. Distracted, indebted, separated states will ill supply the place of that vast and teeming confederacy which has taken our children to its bosom for more than half a century. And even a restored Union, if such a thing be yet possible, must go through a long stage of recovery from its present calamities, before it can be attractive to the emigrant as heretofore.

Few, I think, have at all realized the nature and magnitude of the evil which is impending over us from the closing, even for a time, of that outlet for our superabundant population. For it is most important to observe that its great value arose not only from its largeness, but from its extensive regularity of action. It was a safety valve always open, and expanding and contracting almost to our wish. Periods of comparative depression here, such as rendered emigration

* These numbers are only approximative, as many emigrants go to Canada only on their way to the States; while on the other hand, at certain times, there is a considerable reflux from the States to Canada; but they may serve for our present purpose.

† In strict accuracy, this is not so, as there is considerable export of capital along with emigration. But as this is equally the case in respect of all emigration, it may be left out of the account.

more desirable, were seldom coincident with periods of comparative depression in the States; and, indeed, the broad West hardly knew depression at all. Emigration has been, as I have said, the regular provision for one child in six born in this part of the United Kingdom; but in Ireland more nearly for one child in three. Those must be far more sanguine than I am, who can look without great apprehension at the results of the threatened abolition of that provision, or at least much more than half of it, being the proportion which the States have hitherto afforded. If the privation were to be permanent, it could, as we have seen, be only met by increased mortality, or increased privation, or (and more probably) by an approximation to the French reduced rate of offspring to a marriage. But men do not change without a struggle their habits for the worse, and much trouble would be gone through before our population accommodated itself to the new and deteriorated state of things. I know not whether the same idea may have occurred to others, but to my mind there is at least a very ominous coincidence of date between the interruption of peaceful emigration from Ireland to America, which I believe has already commenced, and the lowering and discontented humour which has so suddenly come to the surface in a portion of the Irish population.

And it surely follows—to come back to that which is the main purpose of this essay—that continued colonization, and the continuance also of our political relation with such colonies as we possess, are more than ever important to the social well-being of the community. Canada, as long as it remains connected with us, affords a certain and regular place of resort for no inconsiderable portion of our overflow. How long Canada might do so if we were to follow the advice of a modern political school, by leaving her to independence—that is, to forming connection with the States or with neighbouring portions of them—no wise man, with the civil war now raging before his eyes, will venture to anticipate. Emigration to Australia and New Zealand is carried on at a greater disadvantage, owing to distance; still it has carried off on the average one-eighth of our overflow since 1825, and will carry off a great deal more. It is, in truth, as yet in its infancy; but let us withdraw from Australia the protection of the British flag, and it is highly improbable, on all ordinary political calculation, that emigration would continue to anything like the same amount when the sense of security now felt under British institution had ceased to exist. The greater the loss, in short, which the sufferings of the American Republic have inflicted on us and on the world, the greater the importance of keeping our hold on those substitutes which have been left to us, and of which the eventual value is as yet undeveloped.

Note.—See *Miscellanea*, “Emigration, 1815-61,” p. 537.
